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SUBJECT: KOREAS TO HOLD WORKING-LEVEL TALKS ON FEBRUARY 15

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On February 14, MOU Director-General for Unification Policy Planning Um Jong-sik told A/DCM that North and South Korea had agreed to hold working-level talks on February 15 at the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC). The main objective was to set a date to resume North-South ministerial talks suspended since July 2006. The ROKG hoped to hold ministerial talks in late February or early March. Um noted that the DPRK had been pressing the ROK to restart the talks, but Seoul resisted until progress was made at the Six Party Talks. Once the ministerials resumed, the Koreans would discuss fertilizer, rice, and light-industrial aid that was suspended following the North's missile launches and nuclear test as well as family reunions. In meetings at MOU and MOFAT, A/DCM stressed that Seoul and Washington needed to maintain close consultations as we moved together to implement the September 19 Joint Statement. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On February 14, A/DCM met MOFAT and MOU colleagues shortly after the Unification Ministry made a 11:30 announcement that the Koreans would hold working-level talks in the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) the following day. In a 2:30 meeting, MOU Director-General for Policy Planning Um Jong-sik explained that in anticipation of significant progress at the Six Party Talks and following ROK inter-agency consultations, the ROKG on February 12 proposed a resumption of inter-Korean talks, which the DPRK accepted on February 13. The two-on-two working-level talks would be led by ROK Assistant Minister for Policy Planning and Public Affairs Lee Kwan-sei and Maeng Kyong-il, DPRK Deputy Chief of the Secretariat at the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland. The talks' objective would be to set a date to resume inter-Korean ministerial talks.

DPRK EXPRESSED INTEREST IN JANUARY

13. (C) During Unification Minister Lee Jae-joung's January 24 visit to the KIC, DPRK officials had indicated to DG Um that if the South proposed inter-Korean talks, the North would be eager to resume dialogue. The DPRK wanted ROKG rice, fertilizer, and light-industrial assistance suspended following the North's missile launches and nuclear test. If the ROK provided humanitarian aid, the DPRK, they claimed, was prepared to move forward on family reunions, a family reunion center construction project at Mt. Kumgang, and the relinking of inter-Korean railways. Um said he told his

interlocutors, however, that Seoul needed progress at the Six Party Talks.

14. (C) Um listed economic and political reasons as the impetus behind the DPRK's desire to restart inter-Korean talks. This year would see four major events for which DPRK officials needed to prepare: Kim Jong-il's 65th birthday on February 16; the late Kim Il-song's 95th birthday on April 15; the Korean Peoples' Army's 75th birthday on April 25; and the tenth anniversary of Kim Jong-il accession to become National Defense Committee Chairman on October 10. The DPRK also planned to host its annual Arirang Festival, which last year was canceled due to flooding in July. These events required resources that the DPRK needed from abroad. Um claimed that in 2006 Pyongyang was full of slogans about nuclear development, but this year banners in the capital emphasized light industry and economic improvement. In addition, Um speculated that the DPRK wanted to meddle in ROK domestic politics. The DPRK might want to bolster proponents of the engagement ahead of the ROK's general election in December.

MINISTERIAL TALKS IN PYONGYANG?

15. (C) Asked about timing of the next round of ministerial talks, Um speculated that the DPRK would not want to hold the talks during or as much as two weeks prior to U.S.-ROK RSOI/Foal Eagle military exercises that were planned for March 26-31. Therefore, the ROKG hoped to hold the ministerial talks in late February or early March. The last round of ministerial talks, the 19th round, were held July 11-13 in Busan, South Korea, so the 20th round would be in North Korea, perhaps Pyongyang. Unification Minister Lee would head the ROKG delegation to ministerial talks, so if they were held in Pyongyang, the ROKG side probably would seek a Lee meeting with Kim Jong-il. Whether or not a meeting occurred would depend on the DPRK.

NORTH-SOUTH SUMMIT?

16. (C) Asked whether the ROKG was planning for an inter-Korean summit, DG Um replied that there were no plans at this point. For now, the ROKG was just trying to resume inter-Korean dialogue. The first step toward that was working-level talks at the KIC.

USG: COORDINATION IMPORTANT

17. (C) A/DCM expressed appreciation for DG Um's briefing and said that now that the Six Parties had agreed on initial actions for the implementation of the Joint Statement, close Washington-Seoul coordination would be even more important because the DPRK would surely try to find differences among the other five parties. The USG would welcome close consultations on ROKG efforts to improve North-South dialogue.

18. (C) Um apologized for not briefing the Embassy in advance of the MOU announcement. He mentioned that Deputy National Security Adviser Yun Byung-see had complained to the Unification Ministry and insisted that it must consult quickly with the Embassy. In the future, the MOU would take steps to improve coordination with the Embassy.

19. (C) A/DCM asked if the ROKG would count resumed humanitarian aid as part of Six Party commitments in return for DPRK progress in declaring and disabling its nuclear programs. Um said that the ROKG had not decided, but MOU's preference was to keep humanitarian aid through North-South dialogue separate to use as leverage for family reunions, military talks and inter-Korean projects. Some in the ROKG, however, wanted to include ROKG aid as part of Six Party

actions.
VERSHBOW